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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4647  
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0925  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9698  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4186  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1642  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3368  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 6794  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4409  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0775  
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0777  
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0447  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2707  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0351  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000752

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/31/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: REGIME TOUGHS GET TOUGHER

REF: RANGOON 698

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Classified By: Poloff Dean Tidwell for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

[¶1.](#) (SBU) SUMMARY: Recent actions by regime authorities show a trend of strengthened surveillance and control of movement and meeting by opposition parties and the general public. In May, Rangoon officials started a campaign to photograph all household members in selected Rangoon communities. Township authorities broadcast public announcements for residents to be present for photographs on specified days. On June 7, Mandalay authorities notified political party leaders that advance approval is required for all meetings, and that a representative of local government will attend and take notes. The new photography campaign and the warnings to party members seem designed to further tighten control over the movement of citizens. END SUMMARY.

Little Reason To Smile For the Camera  
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[¶2.](#) (SBU) The GOB has been updating census information for over a year, but in mid-May, authorities began a campaign to photograph household members in selected Rangoon townships. Local authorities use loudspeakers mounted on vehicles to announce to local communities where all household members will be required to sit for photographs. Each household must pay 1,000 kyats (\$0.80) for two or three 6-inch by 4-inch photos, but larger households report that they have to pay K.1,500 or more. In retail shops in Rangoon, two photos cost about K.400 (\$0.35).

[¶3.](#) (SBU) City authorities, including the ward Peace and Development Committee (PDC) chief and sometimes a Union Solidarity and Development Association representative, visit families in their homes to take the photos, or sometimes order them to gather at a local school for the session. They usually take photos in the evening or at night, when families

are more likely to be at home. In some cases, the photo sessions are scheduled during the day, forcing some people to miss work. A few people who were not able to leave work said they left photos with their families for the authorities to scan.

¶4. (SBU) A resident of Hlaing Thayar Township reported that the chief of the ward PDC arrived with a photographer just as the family was about to go to sleep. Family members had to wear a number around their neck for the group photo. Afterwards the authorities completed a family census form, matching each name with a number. The authorities said they would send a copy of the photo and census form for the family to display at home.

¶5. (C) Former student activist and political prisoner Min Ko Naing said he would refuse to stay home to be photographed. He said, "If the people accept this order and stay at home, then the SPDC will bully them even harder."

¶6. (SBU) The GOB already requires every Burmese citizen to have a personal identification card, called a "Citizenship Verification Card" (formerly "National Registration Card"). This card lists the person's name, father's name, date of birth, distinguishing marks, ethnicity, religion, occupation, and address, and included the person's signature and fingerprint. Each household also has a "household register" of all the members who regularly reside there. In Burmese is called the "midnight list," since authorities demand to see it during nighttime raids to verify the identity of everyone staying at residences. As part of the photography campaign, authorities are allegedly creating new lists that include only those shown in the household photograph.

¶7. (C) It is unclear whether this program will be carried out

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throughout the country, or just in selected Rangoon townships. The areas where the initial efforts are focused, Rangoon's Hlaing Thayar, Da La, Hmawby, Insein, and North and South Okkalapa townships have significant ethnic Karen populations and high proportions of poor laborers, two groups of particular regime concern. Many Karen people believe the photography campaign is related to recent fighting in north Karen State (reftel) and is designed to help authorities to better identify IDPs or troublemakers who may have fled to Rangoon.

#### Keeping Closer Watch

¶8. (C) On June 7, the Mandalay township PDC chairman called five members from the NLD Executive Committee and five members from the National Unity Party to his office. He told them the authorities will require three day advance notice before approving any meeting. A ward PDC officer will then attend each meeting and take photos. Party representatives refused to sign a agreement to follow these rules. NLD leaders told us that they never hold public meetings given the current climate in Mandalay. Members gather quietly at private houses instead, so they are not overly concerned about the new warnings.

¶9. (C) COMMENT: Authorities have not revealed the purpose of the photography campaign, but they clearly have taken their Orwellian practices to the next level of control. Photographing households is another form of intimidation, letting people to let them know "big brother" is watching even closer. The new photos will also make it easier for authorities to conduct spot checks of households and quickly determine whether there are strangers in the camp. Senior General Than Shwe told U/SYG Gambari on May 20 that he was eager to turn over a new page. Recent actions indicate that any pages he may turn are still out of the book "1984." END COMMENT.  
STOLTZ